

Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Tim Walz urged his colleagues to reauthorize and strengthen the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Passed 19 years ago, in large part due to the grassroots efforts of the late Sheila Wellstone, this landmark legislation focused the resources, time, and energy of federal, state, and local law enforcement on the task of preventing and stopping domestic abuse, while providing victims of violence with critical services and assistance.

“The Violence Against Women Act brings domestic abuse out of the shadows and makes it unequivocally clear that no woman should ever be forced to suffer in silence in the face of violence,” said Walz. **“The Senate has worked across the aisle to move forward with a strong reauthorization of VAWA that reaches all victims of domestic violence and the House must do the same. There is no time to waste.”**

Last Congress the U.S. Senate passed a bipartisan reauthorization of VAWA, with key provisions strengthening the law, by a vote of 68 to 31. However, House leadership refused to bring the bipartisan Senate bill to the floor and, 504 days ago, VAWA was allowed to expire.

The Senate has acted swiftly in the new Congress, passing a strong Violence Against Women Act earlier this week with a bipartisan vote of 78-22. Both Senator Franken and Klobuchar supported this commonsense legislation.

VAWA has improved the criminal justice system’s ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. Based on this legislation, every state has enacted laws to make stalking a crime and strengthened criminal rape statutes. Since VAWA became law the annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50 percent – and reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51 percent.

VAWA has also successfully encouraged communities and law enforcement agencies to coordinate their responses to violence against women and provide effective, long-term support for victims.

While we’ve made progress over the years, there is still much work to do. One in four women

have been the victim of severe physical domestic violence and one in five have been raped in their lifetime. This is unacceptable. Failure to enact this important legislation would deprive women, children, and families of vital protection against abuse, and law enforcement of essential tools to combat violence. The 113th Congress must now act quickly to get the job done.

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